

# A walk to awakening

A Plant City man is hiking the 2,175-mile Appalachian Trail on artificial legs.

Associated Press

BENNINGTON, Vt. — Six hundred miles into his trip, Todd Murphy had to get off the Appalachian Trail to fix a crucial piece of equipment — his prosthetic foot.

But Murphy, 34, who lost his lower legs due to a birth defect, didn't let it stop him, continuing on his 2,175-mile journey from Maine to Georgia, at 12 to 19 miles a day.

Accompanied by his girlfriend, the Plant City prosthetic technician — who was fitted with artificial legs after being born with malformed feet — credits his family for helping instill perseverance.

Murphy, an asthmatic, started planning for the trip a year ago.

He hiked, watched documentaries, talked to his doctor and prosthetist and had a set of lightweight artificial legs with rigid ankles and stiff feet built for the trip.

He hit the trail June 3, struggling through rocky terrain in Maine and the White Mountains of New Hampshire, sometimes thinking he'd have to quit.

"But then I thought 'If I can get through the Whites, if I can just get through New Hampshire,' I said, 'I can make it the rest of the way,'" he said. "You get somewhere, you're miserable, you hurt, then you have dinner, lick your wounds, talk to a bunch of great

people ... laugh. The next thing you know, I wake up in the morning and I'm back on top of the game."

A few days into the trip, the components in his artificial leg broke. He had to hike down and call his prosthetist, who sent replacements to a post office, which took a few days. Then it was back on the trail.

It took him two hours to go 1 mile in Mahoosuc Notch, Maine, and he suffered a bloody face and black eye in a fall at another point.

Then there was the time he hiked 1.8 miles out of the way, eventually retracing his steps.

"It was incredibly steep. By the time I got to the hut, I was exhausted. I had fallen down, gotten scraped up. I was crying, my legs were giving out. I was dehydrated, what a mess."

But he also relished the sweeping views — from Saddleback Mountain in Maine and the Presidential Range in New Hampshire.

"It's just been a fantastic awakening. And I was ready for an awakening," he said.

With the hardest part behind him, he welcomed the rolling hills and open hiking paths on the 150 miles through Vermont.

His destination: Springer Mountain, in Georgia. He has promised his 10-year-old son he'll be back to his Plant City home by Thanksgiving.





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**Todd Murphy makes his way up a mountainside in Bennington, Vt., Wednesday. Murphy, who lost his legs to a birth defect, had lightweight artificial legs with rigid ankles and stiff feet built specifically for the trip.**